

Christmas Newsletter

December 2020

Hello dear friends of Pilsdon

How are you? We bring our fourth newsletter since lockdown and are sad we were unable to send the others through the mail to those of you who prefer to hold them in your hand. We just didn't have the pairs of hands to make it happen. We know many of you had friends or family who printed off copies. So we say thank you to everyone who made this happen. Thanks also to all of you who pray for us, and who generously share your gifts of time, money and ongoing encouragement.

The wonder of Christmas this Christmas will need to be freshly created for many, no more 'this is how we do Christmas, .. it's our family tradition. For others of you who have often been alone it may not be new and you will have been used to managing what can be a difficult time. It may be you have lost more loved ones than those who are left? Memories.



Sue, our Warden

The robin is sitting on the bench just outside the french windows in our office. Surely the robin knows too that we have a 'moment', most days, where we meet each other. Am I the robin or is he me? There is a familiar joy in his presence, he cocks his head and as he flies away my heart shifts in momentary loss. Pilsdon is flooded with these moments when I'm in the right place on the inside.



Bob and Jack sowing garlic

How do we find the innocence where wonder is ever present and yet hard to find at times? Perhaps there is something just at the edge of our peripheral vision, .. something we put off, .. or are just out of the habit of investing the time. Giving just a moment or two, looking each day noticing the changes as the sun moves across the sky, a particular tree is seen anew, a tiny weed between paving slabs glistens and gently trembles in the breeze. These moments are always around for us to notice and meet. Awakening moments where a pause connects us to the space where there is no separation,... Advent is our opportunity to reconnect to a rhythm if we have lost one. To begin anew with something different if we have outgrown an old prayer routine and we find ourselves coming 'home' again with fresh eyes and ears amidst the everyday and commonplace; our readings and reflections, like the star, guide the way too, so familiar and so different this year.



We had sad news yesterday, 13th December. Ruth Thurgur rang just after lunch to say Gaynor had died very peacefully in her sleep at 6.30 in the morning. Ruth and Mike had managed, despite all the restrictions to visit her and she rallied a little, recognising Ruth and held our her hand. Even after a tremendously long life, she enjoyed her 100th birthday in May, we feel her loss here. Gaynor was and will be such an inspiration to us and of course her book 'Pilsdon Morning' beautifully describes the essence of our lives hardly changed from those first beginnings.

There will be a Memorial Service to celebrate her life here at Pilsdon in May, .. this is a hope and we will keep you in touch with possible dates.

Here are a few lines from her 'Pilsdon Morning':
'Sit for a moment in the Pilsdon garden on a summer evening. The air is laden with the fragrance of roses and of honeysuckle, freshened by the tang of a sea breeze and the scent of new mown hay. One or two late bees are still gathering a few drops of honey. An owl flits silently across the churchyard.... you are alone and yet not wholly alone. ... Accept the pause and let it strengthen you. The name of the pause is Pilsdon.'

We thank you Gaynor Smith, a founding member of this community, rest in peace.

What is it you long for this Christmas? Has this pandemic year changed your priorities? For some it has. The many emails and phone calls from people reevaluating their lives have privileged us with hopeful conversations. To share the story of Pilsdon and how we live always re-connects us to the original vision, it brought us here and keeps us here for as long as we are meant to be here. We find ourselves encouraging people to live this way of life right where they are, and to find others to join in with and it might just catch on, ... It's called Church.

Church communities who try to live as an everyday community, even though dispersed, can bring a new understanding to 'sharing everything in common'. How might our Church communities look if we took this particular invitation literally? Our present Church of England is continuing to tear itself apart and sadly in the new attempt to bring healing to the arguments about human sexuality, appears to have been derailed with very little 'pause'. One prominent voice saying almost immediately, .. 'if we don't keep to tradition we will go'. And the time goes on and the hurt continues. The ongoing temptation to need 'power over people' continues to hold sway whereas the life Jesus called us to live is about 'power with others'. Jesus was crucified because of his refusal to bow to the representatives of the 'power over' leadership of his day. Jesus faced his own temptations, .. 'you are so special so jump', ... love and esteem issues, 'turn this stone into bread', security issues and 'bow down before me', power and control issues, .. We all have them, take a look at one of my beloved teachers Thomas Keating; his very short book, 'The Human Condition'.

Rather than leaving the Church more of us are led and give our hearts to a life that finds the liminal spaces. Ancient contemplative practices and wisdom teaching was hidden for centuries in a few enclosed religious communities; now these underground rivers of eternal spiritual wisdom are joyfully surfacing like oases in what can sometimes feel like a desert of selective literalism.

In one paragraph of Percy and Gaynor's Christmas letter of 1964 , they say:-

'Very important also were the lectures on the technique of meditation given at Pilsdon by the Venerable Ananda Bohdi, a Canadian born Buddhist priest, and now a leading authority on Buddhism in the west. The inspiration of his teaching made us aware not only of Eastern mysticism, but also of our own neglect of our specifically Christian heritage.'

I've often wondered if as well as the Eucharist being made the central sacrament of worship, had the washing of feet also been part of every Sunday service, would things be any different now? To be washed and to wash another's feet strips us just as it grounds us in the lived reality of our own frailty and beauty, and its hard to stay cross with or be spiteful to someone who might wash your feet next Sunday.

We are all a work in progress and struggle like Jacob with the angel to let go of unhealthy patterns and begin again, ... even if there is a bit of a remaining limp to remind us of the ongoing struggle. Perhaps this Advent we can encourage and challenge each other on our spiritual journey to take a moment's pause to 'meet a robin' to practice anew, to be open with a trusted person to share the challenges we face and the blessings we have been given; finding more spontaneously the hoped for and longed for Baby Jesus who became the Christ. So let us pray together that with God's grace we might birth something new, something good and beautiful and true.

As we light our candles on our three chandeliers in the church we will be lighting them for you.

We will light candles this Christmas

*Candles of joy, despite all sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,
Candles of courage for fears ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days.
Candles of love to inspire all our living,
Candles that will burn all the year long.*

Howard Thurman

With our love and many gentle blessings to you and those you love this Christmas.

Sue

Do read on and enjoy the rest of this newsletter with contributions made from some of the different voices and experiences of our community...



I sit here like a coiled spring waiting for the phone to ring or an email to appear with a BBC producer telling me that my entry to the Radio 3 Carol Competition has reached the short list of 6 and will be voted on by listeners between now and Christmas.

I have entered the competition before and despite my love of music of many different forms, I have always struggled to come up with an original melody that does not sound like something someone else has already written. This year however I have turned out a tune of which I am quite pleased. Whether the judges and listening public will hear it in the same way remains to be seen.

My thoughts then take me to giving the tune a name. The hymn tunes such as you would find in the Laudate hymnal might be named after the composer, hence Rockingham, Nettleton. Some tunes use a word or phrase from the text – particularly German ones. Others are named after places – Aberystwyth, Down Ampney – so why not Pilsdon? Given the community's rich choral tradition, it is quite likely that someone has beaten me to it – perhaps someone reading this may know.

Win, lose or draw I will try and persuade the Warden to work this into one of our services. Or else, I might just turn it out at our New Year's Eve 'entertainment'. How about I leave a copy in a cupboard in the vestry? Like a time capsule - to be discovered in thirty eight years' time when the clear-out takes place as the big anniversary hoves in to view.....



The text is the first verse of a poem "Christmas Carol" by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906). The complete poem and more information about the competition and the winning entries can be seen on the BBC Radio 3 website.

Bob Edwards

If you would like to see Bob singing his carol, search for the video of him on our twitter feed @pilsdoncomm

A message from our Chair of Trustees, Andy Davey



A Thank You.

Living in community is a choice; one renewed daily, and often a demanding one. So I wanted, on behalf of my four fellow trustees, to say how thankful we are that Sue, Mary and Frantisek, along with the volunteers have made that choice. They are giving so much of themselves, and they each really do have a lot to give! This has been more so than ever through this difficult year of lockdown where they have had to forgo time off away from the community; and so many tasks have work added for those extra hygiene hoops! Jane our Office Coordinator continued to work from home for the first lockdown, creating new ways to support Sue and the community from afar, and she has moved between being in the office and working from home since.

Trustees.

As volunteer trustees, we aim to assist in the background, looking after the necessary levels of accountability that any charity must do these days. We are a sounding board for the warden and with the members, look to help guide the ethos of Pilsdon. We really need 2 or 3 more to join us at present so please consider if you would like to help in this way. If you email me (mail@ajdavey.uk) I'd be pleased to let you know more about the role.

Your support.. means a great deal to us all, however you are able to express it. One way, of course, is through gifts, and last year nearly a quarter of our income (that we need to keep running) came from donations and legacies. This is quite (and quietly) remarkable. We hope that those of you who have been able to support us in this way feel duly thanked! (We are doing our best to make sure you are).

I believe Percy Smith would often say in the early years of Pilsdon, when addressing gatherings about the community, "you are our bankers". In those early years the community had no financial reserves to fall back on and the day to day running of the community often depended on the arrival of a cheque "out of the blue". It meant that in a very real way, the vocation of the community was being shared with an invisible number of generous supporters. And the timeliness of those gifts strengthened the conviction that we were part of a "divine cooperation".

We still feel the same today, that many of those who will be reading this, are unostentatiously and very generously sharing in our life through your donations.

These days, we are fortunate to have a larger reserve than in the past. It means we can invest in the future in a number of ways:

- We have plans to replace a couple of ageing cabins that provide accommodation for some of our members with a purpose-built and fully insulated new building. We want to look after our members who give so much back to the community.
- We can prepare for some of the big items of expenditure on our buildings that come round every 10 years or so.
- We can absorb the financial shock of unexpected events like Covid without going under! The economic downturn is not going to make things any easier for us.

Legacies: Over the years, we have been particularly helped by people leaving something to us in their will. (Eg. our new members accommodation will be in memory of Vera Smith, the widow of a distant cousin of Percy Smith's who surprised us with her legacy). It's not something we often want to think about, but if you are making or updating your will this year, and haven't already....maybe think of Pilsdon. Thank you.

(Trustees: Andy Davey, Amanda Streatfeild, Sue Gibson, Els Jolly and Eddie Howson)

Moving in from the edge.....

In October 2020 Marian and David spent a month as residential volunteers at Pilsdon. Here are some reflections from that time. First Marian.....

When I wrote 'the volunteer's tale' for the 60th anniversary I reflected on being on the edge of things. During this first year as a day volunteer I recognised that much of what Pilsdon is, is not visible to those who come and go, who do not stay to share in the daily and seasonal rhythms of the community. Spending time as a residential volunteer in October offered an opportunity to experience more, to know more deeply the life that is shared within the community. Here are some glimpses of that.....

Waking up to the gentle sound of cows coming in to be milked. Eddie's fish and chips on Friday evenings, and Henry and Trevor's cooked breakfasts. Looking up at the completely dark night sky and seeing the stars shine more brightly than elsewhere. Emma and Eddie giving supportive teaching to me as I learn to pasteurise milk, and Simon offering quiet encouragement when I stumble to remember the details. Sunlight on muddy puddles, the sound of rain on the roof of our flat and of the rooks gathering in the trees that surround the barn.

Reminiscences shared at breakfast and new stories to recount from time spent together. Hard work nurturing the soil in a process of recycling and renewing – muck spreading! Enjoying the produce that is the result of communal labour in the garden and the kitchen. Learning from Jack that pigs' tails straighten when you rub their tummies! Enjoying the voices of the choir coached by Joni as people come together in the church to celebrate the anniversary in a rather different way in this year in which we have had to learn to live differently with one another. Conversation, friendship and care for one another. A tired body, a relaxed mind and a sense of peace.



And David.....



Watching Matt taking daily care of his jars of sourdough starter yeasts - and then enjoying the wonderful tasting bread that results. Preparing to take charge of cooking the evening meal and discovering that I'm working with Adam, who is a trained chef and who casually produces a stack of filled savoury pancakes with minimum fuss and little need of input from me. The extraordinary harvest of pumpkins and squashes from the vegetable garden - an amazing variety of shapes and sizes, plain, striped or speckled, shades of yellow, orange, green, blue and black. This year's two calves, Felix and Freddie, evidently at ease in each other's company and visibly growing even in the four weeks that we are there. Mid-October, and time for George to set a blazing log fire in the Common Room every afternoon. And we ended our stay with enhanced respect for the love, commitment and sheer hard work shown by Sue, Mary and Frantisek and long-term residential volunteers like Bob and Craig; and looking forward to being able to spend more time at Pilsdon.

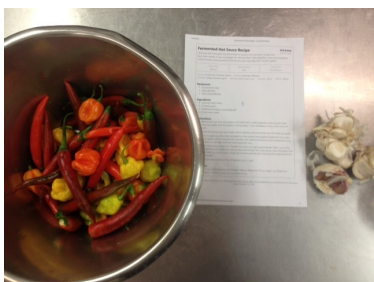
The winter is coming and my first year in my new role as “the farmer” will be complete. It has been a very busy year with lots of exciting things happening in the farm, forming relationships with our animals, and making a few mistakes! I felt stressed a lot, enjoyed the work a lot, and learnt a lot. Our livestock are prepared for the winter and are receiving the best care that we can give them.

This year will be my third Christmas at Pilsdon; it will feel different for me as I have not been able to go home to the Czech Republic now for almost one year. One of my favourite aspects of the season are the carols that we sing. My friend Bob—who you heard from earlier in the newsletter—introduced me to an English carol “Good King Wenceslas” which is a beautiful old carol about the Czech patron Saint Wenceslas, or as he is known in the Czech Republic, Vaclav. The Duke of Bohemia, Vaclav the Good, lived in the 10th Century and is known to have looked after the poor, widows, orphans and those in prison. He was considered a martyr and made a saint soon after his death. Listening to this wonderful carol I feel spiritually and emotionally closer to my home, and able to prepare myself for the beautiful time of Christmas.

Although this year will be different because we can’t have the Broadoak Choir who usually come and sing in our church, and none of us are unable to go to churches and cathedrals to listen to choirs. With the hope which Jesus brings us I know that all shall be well and I await Christmas at Pilsdon with anticipation. *Frantisek*



Meadow our 18 month old Jersey cow, she will join Daffodil and Snowdrop



Serving suggestion



Our George tending to the fire

We have been continuing to enjoy the abundance of our gardens; we are grateful for our fertile soil, all the worms and fungi that keep it healthy, and all the hands that work planting, harvesting and mucking. There are always one or two star crops...and this year we have been blessed with ‘barrows worth of colourful squash and enough chillies to spice up at least 3 years’ worth of curries. We’ve made chilli jam, chilli relish, chilli powder, and fermented chilli sauce. Our community taste-buds will never be the same after a full on assault from the potent Dorset Zinger!

The generosity of friends and donors from the local community continues to amaze us. We have received food parcels, toiletries, socks, blankets, clothing and financial contributions all of which have ensured our food and household budgets are well below the costs we expected; thank you to all the churches and schools who have remembered us, and to Waitrose Bridport for their generous annual donation to our Christmas meal.

We have been glad to be able to share some of what we have grown this season with the Bridport food bank. This has been such a joy as we have been unable to share our bounty with wayfarers and other visitors in our usual ways. Hopefully we have stored enough pickled and preserved produce so that when our doors open once again some of you will be able to enjoy a taste of Lockdown Summer 2020 chutney during a Open-up Summer 2021 Saturday cheese night. Here’s hoping.

We move towards making better, more ethical choices in our purchasing of household provisions; using less plastic and choosing to buy from more responsible companies. Our favourite so far being a loo roll manufacturer that many of you already use, *Who Gives A Crap*. If you don’t know about them have a look at their website: recycled, plastic free, and 50% of their profits go to help build loos around the world. If there is one thing lockdown taught us it’s the importance of a reliable toilet roll supplier! *Mary*

I wasn't quite sure what to expect before moving to Pilsdon Community as a volunteer, but one thing I definitely wasn't prepared for was the colourful medley of work experience that awaited me. Most of the things that now fill my schedule are things I've never done before, and that I could never have seen myself doing short months ago. One thing's for sure, though - a week at Pilsdon never looks the same as any other.

For members and volunteers, Monday begins around the meeting room table with a quick lowdown on the week ahead as holes are filled, jobs covered, and events pencilled in. Not too long after, I'll find myself in the garden shed following a similar procedure for the coming week of garden work, this time with a new set of people, different kinds of tasks, and a lot more applause (the past week's accomplishments are always enthusiastically acknowledged at a garden meeting). In the afternoon I might be scheduled to get supper on the table, usually working as a team with someone else, which always means an inspirational flip through the cookbook, lively conversations as vegetables are peeled and pots stirred, and a good dose of washing up at the end.



Eddie and Bob re-felting the shed roof, they were overheard whistling whilst they worked.

I might hit the garden the following morning and pull some weeds, harvest some fruit, or join a team spreading manure on the beds for the winter, and the afternoon could find me in the looseboxes, topping up hay racks, shovelling out the stalls, and finishing off with the calming, almost therapeutic task of milking the cows by hand. Wednesday is my day off, and there's always plenty to do, from connecting with my creative side via art or music to popping into town for a bit of shopping or running up the nearby Pilsdon Penn for a breath-taking view, if the weather's nice. In the evening, there's usually a cosy game of cards by the fire in the common room.

I'm back to work bright and early the next day for the morning milking shift, and after lunch I might be asked to run in a milk sample to be tested, drop off some prescriptions at the doctor's, or drive someone to an appointment. Once a week, I also end my day with a quick walk of the grounds to turn off lights, shut in the chickens and ducks, and lock up for the night. Friday morning might find me in the kitchen again, heating up a soup or throwing together a frittata with last night's leftovers for lunch, but Friday afternoons are dedicated to crafts like pottery, green woodworking, and knitting as of a few weeks ago, so I'll end off the day with a soothing few hours working on a clay sculpture I've begun.

I'm on laundry duty on weekends, so I spend a few hours Saturday morning loading the machines, hanging things up to dry, and scrubbing the laundry floor, and in the afternoon I might be scheduled for a dairy shift, where the milk from the cows gets processed and pasteurised. Saturday night is film night, so we'll shift the armchairs in the library to face the TV and end the evening with anything from *Bridge of Spies* to *Finding Nemo*. Sunday morning's always busy, with a big lunch to prepare, but then we'll end a quieter afternoon with a church service and a few hymns, followed by a light supper of soup and sandwiches to finish off the week.

Life at Pilsdon is unlike any other experience I've had, but for me, that's what makes it so refreshing and invigorating. I'm always up to something new, I'm often doing it with someone else, and a day never goes by where I didn't make at least one meaningful connection with someone else - one of the biggest bonuses of communal life. If there's one thing life here is not though, it's boring. *Craig*

Hi. I'm James and I moved from the New Forest to volunteer in the community during the start of the second lockdown in November. I was previously working in environmental education so I'm very much appreciating the switch to environmental medication with all that Pilsdon has to offer. It's such a beautiful and restorative place, providing plenty of opportunities to connect with the land, the animals and the seasons. I love the way that *where* I now live has a direct link to *how* I now live, such as what's growing in the garden impacting what's on my plate for supper. And *who* I now live with changing what's important in my day as our shared work sustains our shared lives. It's been great getting to know so many new people during a time when socialising has had to be so restricted in other areas and I feel very fortunate to be able to learn so much more about community life by living with others so well practiced and willing to make space for me. Whilst getting to know the ropes and adjusting to the daily rhythms I have been delighted to have had the chance to get creative in many ways, which has also included playing with the Aga in order to develop my bread making skills. When living by myself there was only so much bread I could eat but now at Pilsdon, with plenty of mouths to feed, I'm having to scale up significantly!

I've really enjoyed getting stuck in and experiencing such a wide variety of activities, whilst also finding out how Pilsdon will stretch me and help me to reflect on my faith in this new context. My time here has gone fast already and I look forward to the festivities of Christmas and what the New Year will bring, especially as it will inevitably involve lots of enticing open fires.



Welcome James and your woodworking skills



Crafternoons have been re-established at Pilsdon. Inspired by our chats about the many creative ideas and abilities currently shared amongst the community we felt the need to establish a time each week when we could learn from each other and make space for trying to develop our creative potential. It's proved to be such an important time as we have a go in the helpful understanding that things don't need to be perfect to be enjoyed. We've really benefitted from the time spent together and by putting off other distractions it's enabled several of us to come alive in new ways experiencing the benefits of making something simply for the pleasure of it. Knowing we've shaped something with our own hands ignites, inspires and refreshes. So far we've had a go at expressing ourselves in the medium of clay and working on our axe skills, in order to do some future green woodworking and whittling. Plenty of mess has been made, skills have been shared and unique objects formed. Crafternoons have been a chance to do something a bit different, and are a welcomed addition to our weekly rhythm. *James*

New Book by Former Warden of Pilsdon Jonathan Herbert

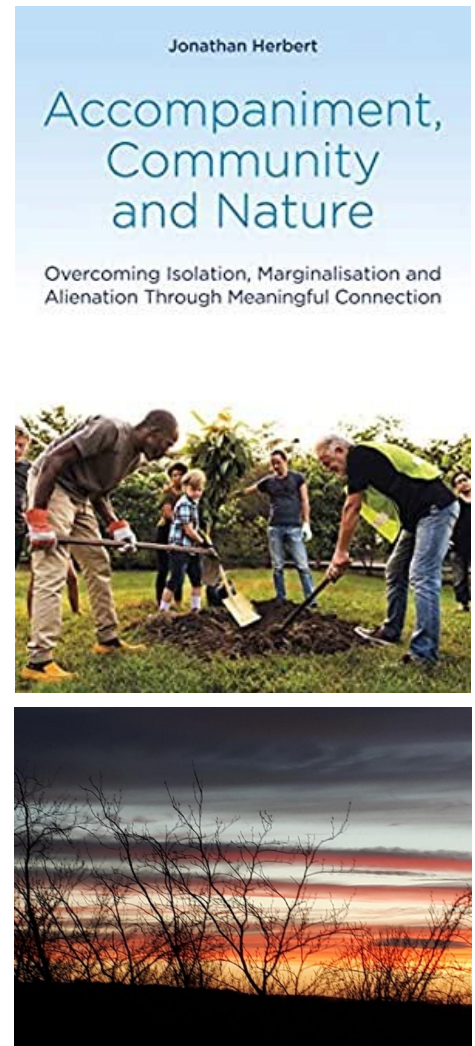
Jonathan writes "When I left Pilsdon 10 years ago, I spent 3 months living in the Palestinian village of Jayous on the West Bank, as part of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme. Out of that grew a desire to write a book about how to accompany people. As I thought about this I realised the place I'd learned most about this walking alongside people was Pilsdon."

The book is wide ranging, looking at life in community, spiritual accompaniment, peace-making and our relationship with nature. It's fairly easy to read with a mix of stories and reflection.

"Accompaniment Community and Nature" is published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

This beautifully written book draws on a rich fund of stories of community, ministry, and pilgrimage, and on centuries of spiritual wisdom from many traditions and cultures, in describing what it means to accompany another, and so resist the deepening culture of isolation fostered by modern individualism. Once you start reading you will find it hard to put down, as I did! And you will be blessed by the sense that in the voice of the author, you feel something of how it is to be accompanied by him. -- Michael Northcott, Emeritus Professor of Ethics, University of Edinburgh.

The book can be bought online or by contacting Jonathan at Hilfield Friary, Dorchester DT2 7BE.



PILSDON WEST MALLING IS LOOKING FOR A NEW GUARDIAN

The Trustees of our sister community in West Malling wish to appoint a Guardian to succeed their present Guardian who is retiring in March 2021:

Do you feel called to live and serve in an ecumenical Christian community? Are you an empathetic and understanding person? If so, you might be the highly motivated person, probably ordained, to guide our community. We are offering you the opportunity to devote some years of your life to the pastoral and practical care of lives in need of healing and rebuilding. As Guardian you will work collaboratively and flexibly with other community members, volunteers and outside agencies. You will be responsible for ensuring the safety of the residents, the management of the buildings and compliance with regulatory and financial matters. Through your communication skills you will promote the work of Pilsdon at Malling.

Pilsdon at Malling provides a safe environment for those on the margins of society. It is a place where people are accepted for who they are, and given time and space to reflect, heal and find a path towards health and well-being. The Community is based in a former monastery, adjacent to the Anglican Benedictine Abbey of St Mary, West Malling in Kent.

Interested? Want to know more? Visit our website www.pilsdonatmall.org.uk/

Please contact - The Chair of the Board of Trustees - ysmyth7@gmail.com

Head your email - Pilsdon Guardian Information

The closing date for your Letter of Application is 31 December 2020.